

## University of Groningen

### Mind the Gap

Wiers, Jochem J D

**IMPORTANT NOTE: You are advised to consult the publisher's version (publisher's PDF) if you wish to cite from it. Please check the document version below.**

*Document Version*

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

*Publication date:*

2016

[Link to publication in University of Groningen/UMCG research database](#)

*Citation for published version (APA):*

Wiers, J. J. D. (2016). *Mind the Gap: How to Bridge the Gap between Foreign Policy and Scholarship* .

**Copyright**

Other than for strictly personal use, it is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

The publication may also be distributed here under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license. More information can be found on the University of Groningen website: <https://www.rug.nl/library/open-access/self-archiving-pure/taverne-amendment>.

**Take-down policy**

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

*Downloaded from the University of Groningen/UMCG research database (Pure): <http://www.rug.nl/research/portal>. For technical reasons the number of authors shown on this cover page is limited to 10 maximum.*

# ***Mind the Gap***

How to Bridge the Gap between Foreign Policy and Scholarship

Inaugural Address by

Prof. Mr. Dr. Jochem J.D. Wiers

upon his acceptance of the Chair of  
Dutch Foreign Policy and Policy Development  
at the University of Groningen  
endowed by the Groningen University Fund  
on Tuesday June 28, 2016

Translation: Mischa Hoyinck & Robert Chesal

*The Pythia, the Oracle of Delphi, served as the mouthpiece of divine wisdom not only to Greek citizens and city-states, but also to foreign rulers. There are various accounts of the origins of the Delphic Oracle. One account talks of a goat herder named Coretas, who lost one of his goats one day when it fell into a crack in the earth. When Coretas got the animal out, he noticed it was behaving strangely. On entering the chasm himself, he was filled with a divine presence and could see beyond the present, into the past and the future.*

This begs the question: Can a chasm serve as a source of inspiration...?

## **Introduction**

There is a gap between policy and scholarship in the field of Dutch foreign relations. I see this professorship as an opportunity to bridge that divide. It will enable me to draw connections between my policy work at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the scholarly work I do at the university. I hope these connections will benefit others too, on both sides of the divide. Having earned two Bachelor's degrees, a Master's degree and a PhD, accepting this academic post feels somewhat like coming home. All the more so, of course, because this professorship is in my hometown.

In essence, the Chair's task boils down to two concepts: interdisciplinarity and exchange. But allow me to say something first about the two sides of the chasm, as I experience them. I will begin by discussing policy, and then I'll cross over to the academic side. I'll argue that both the policy and the academic discipline of international relations can benefit from ideas developed in other scholarly fields: ideas about human thought and behavior, and about complex systems. I will conclude by discussing the bridges between policy and scholarship: bridges that have already been built and those that might be built in the future. By the way, the gap itself might also be an interesting area to explore.

## **I. The Policy Side**

The world has become multi-polar or polycentric. Power is shifting from the West to the rest. Some even argue that superpowers have ceased to exist altogether.<sup>1</sup> The multilateral system is under pressure. Although the European Union has become larger and more diverse, it is subject to ever more tension. Member states disagree about the distribution of refugees. Terrorist attacks are bringing extremism into our own backyard. The countries on the fringes of the EU will remain unstable for a long time. NATO is more relevant than ever, particularly thanks to Putin's Russia. The US feels that Europe should organize its own defense. The majority of British have voted to leave the EU, which increases uncertainty in Europe. It is clear that Britain is not only the country where this issue strikes a chord. Anti-European politicians are riding a wave of

---

<sup>1</sup> See Kishore Mahbubani (2008), *The New Asian Hemisphere: The Irresistible Shift of Global Power to the East*, New York: Public Affairs; Ian Bremmer (2012), *Every Nation for Itself: Winners and Losers in a G-Zero World*, New York: Portfolio; National Intelligence Council (NIC) (2012), *Global Trends 2030: Alternative Worlds*, Washington, D.C.: NIC; European Strategy and Policy Analysis System (ESPAS) (2014), *Global Trends to 2030: Can the EU Meet the Challenges Ahead?*, Brussels: ESPAS.

popularity in many countries. There is an underlying, but widely felt, discomfort among many citizens about who actually profits from globalization and market integration, and whether our leaders are actually able to control the flow of humans, capital and data.

Recent interviews with leaders from the public and private sectors paint a picture of a volatile, complex and ambiguous world.<sup>2</sup> In such a world, leadership is mainly about how to deal with uncertainties: the key words in the interviews were coping and adapting.<sup>3</sup> It is quite a challenge to show leadership in that kind of world, while at the same time convincing the electorate. A similar challenge confronts the Dutch Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation. They are tasked with no less than nine objectives between them, including international rule of law and human rights, security, European collaboration, fair trade and development.<sup>4</sup> These are not just ambitious objectives; they are also difficult to make tangible. The only clearly defined ministerial responsibilities are those concerning consular representation.<sup>5</sup> The rest are all goals the Netherlands could possibly contribute to, but actually achieving them greatly depends on others, and on developments beyond our control.

This discrepancy between our foreign policy objectives and our often modest contribution to their fulfillment can make Dutch parliamentary debates somewhat surreal. MPs give the minister a hard time for setbacks in the Middle East, for instance, or for disgraceful practices in Congo's mining industry. In their responses, the ministers usually talk about broad-based efforts by the EU, NATO, OSCE, OECD and the UN. This leaves members of parliament and the media feeling shortchanged, while the civil servants complain about the superficiality and short-sightedness of such debates. Time and again, parliament puts the spotlight on the latest foreign crisis or disaster, and the minister is pressed to show what action he or she is going to take to straighten out the mess.

There is another trend that adds to the plight of policy advisors: fact-free politics and cherry picking the facts. Politicians like Donald Trump select only the facts that support their story and even make things up. Closer to home, we see the same tendency in the debate on migration: both the positive and the negative effects of migration are greatly exaggerated. Dutch sociologist and migration expert Hein de Haas has refuted several persistent myths, including the falsehoods that there is more migration now than ever before, and that more development in the migrants' countries of origin will limit migration.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>2</sup> Nik Gowing and Chris Langdon (2015), 'Thinking the Unthinkable: A New Imperative for Leadership in the Digital Age', [www.churchillcentral.com](http://www.churchillcentral.com).

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>4</sup> See the annual Explanatory Memorandums to their budgets: [www.rijksbegroting.nl/2016](http://www.rijksbegroting.nl/2016), Chapter V on Foreign Affairs: (1) reinforcing international rule of law and respecting human rights, (2) security and stability, (3) European cooperation, (4) consular representation and international promotion of Dutch values and interests; and Chapter XVII on Foreign Trade and Development Cooperation: (1) fair trade and investments, (2) sustainable development, food security and water, (3) social development, (4) peace and security to foster development, and (5) improved frameworks for development.

<sup>5</sup> See the general objective in the national Dutch budget's Chapter V, Article 4: 'Providing excellent consular services to Dutch citizens in emergency situations abroad, as well as providing travel documents to Dutch citizens abroad ...'. This is followed by several, further specified, duties of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

<sup>6</sup> See [www.heindehaas.org](http://www.heindehaas.org).

Rather than focusing on incidents and opinions, the foreign policy debate ought to focus on how the Netherlands is dealing with the uncertain and complex world we live in. Do we have all the relevant information? Do we understand current developments and events? How do we put them in perspective without rushing to judgment? Are we learning any lessons from the past, by evaluating our policies for instance?<sup>7</sup> How do we translate our analyses into policy options and action? What principles are we basing ourselves on? Who do we want to cooperate with, in what alliances and with which partners?

Dutch foreign policy has been based on 'peace, profits and principles' for centuries.<sup>8</sup> And since World War Two, the Netherlands has been relying on alliances to reinforce those foundations. For peace and security, we have relied on NATO (and the US in particular). For our wealth and welfare, we have counted on the European Union (and especially Germany). To foster our principles of international law and human rights, we mainly depend on the multilateral system (and the United Nations first and foremost). This is why we have been following the Netherlands' bid for a temporary seat on the UN Security Council with bated breath.

But we cannot afford to allow either our principles or our alliances to remain static, because the world does not stand still either. Nothing is unchangeable: not NATO, not the EU, and not the UN either. What's more, our principles and alliances sometimes conflict with each other. It is therefore our responsibility to regularly reassess and calibrate them, and to continually analyze world developments. This responsibility is, to some extent, covered by the coalition agreements and policy agendas drawn up at the beginning of a new government's term of office.<sup>9</sup> The strategies of organizations like the EU and NATO play an important part as well.<sup>10</sup>

In which policy areas is the Netherlands just a 'tag along', and in which ones can the Dutch really make a difference?<sup>11</sup> This is a crucial question because, in areas where we want to make a difference, we need to develop a long-term strategy and be prepared to be held accountable for that strategy.

---

<sup>7</sup> The Dutch Development Coordination and Policy Evaluation Body [Inspectie Ontwikkelingssamenwerking en Beleidsevaluatie; IOB] is an independent organization housed at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs that conducts research into the implementation and impact of Dutch foreign policy. Initially, the organization only evaluated Dutch development aid projects, but in 1996 its remit was expanded to cover all foreign policy. The IOB's policy evaluations and audits are sent to the House of Representatives, accompanied by a response from the Minister(s). These reports are a major source of information for Parliament and the media. However, it is difficult to assess the extent to which they shape the debate and influence future policy. See [www.government.nl](http://www.government.nl) and [www.iob-evaluatie.nl](http://www.iob-evaluatie.nl)

<sup>8</sup> Roel Van der Veen (2011), 'Op de Apenrots: Beleidsontwikkeling op het ministerie van Buitenlandse Zaken' [The Law of the Jungle: Policy Development at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs], inaugural address at the University of Groningen, published in a series of inaugural speeches from the University's Faculty of Arts; Joris Voorhoeve (1979), *Peace, Profits and Principles*, The Hague: Nijhoff. See also Duco Hellema (2014), *Nederland in de Wereld*, Utrecht: Spectrum.

<sup>9</sup> For example, in the first year of Prime Minister Rutte's second cabinet, the government published an international security strategy, a human rights strategy, an aid and trade strategy, and an EU strategy (in an extended version of the annual 'State of the Union' speech).

<sup>10</sup> The EU Global Strategy was presented to the European Council in late June, while NATO will be evaluating the implementation of its Strategic Concept from 2010, in Warsaw in July. For NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept (an update is being prepared), see [http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics\\_56626.htm#](http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_56626.htm#). For the EU's Global Strategy, see <https://europa.eu/globalstrategy/en/global-strategy-foreign-and-security-policy-european-union>.

<sup>11</sup> The Netherlands Scientific Council on Government Policy WRR calls this niche diplomacy: focusing on a limited number of topics in which you want to make a difference. See WRR (2010), *Aan het buitenland gehecht*.

And there we have it: the word ‘strategy’. It’s a word that is applied and misapplied to so many things, usually to lend something (or someone) undue importance.<sup>12</sup> As the Head of the Strategy Advisory Unit at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, I’d better watch out. In my definition, strategic advice pertains to better informing the decision makers by focusing on the broader context and the longer term. It also pertains to offering a different perspective, or playing devil’s advocate. As strategic advisors, we take stock of global and European trends and turn them into foreign policy dilemmas and options. Examples of these trends are shifts in global power, globalization, technology, demographics, migration, inequality and climate change. By combining these trends with the Netherlands’ foreign policy objectives, we arrive at four main topics that will set the strategic Dutch foreign policy agenda for the next few years:

1. Global governance in a world of shifting power; how can we attain some sort of order, taking into account developing countries and non-state actors?
2. Governing the EU and the Eurozone; how can we collaborate effectively in a Union where internal differences are growing, while continuing to engender enough grass roots support from the population? The same question applies to the Eurozone.
3. The ring around Europe; how should Europe and the Netherlands deal with the long-term instability and insecurity on Europe’s eastern and southern fringes?
4. Migration; how can Europe find a balanced response to migration in which it takes in refugees, refuses illegal immigrants, and controls and facilitates legal migration?

Fact finding and fact ranking are indispensable tools for getting a grip on this uncertain, complex world. We rely on data and statistics, policy evaluation, scholarly research, and the work of advisory councils and think tanks.<sup>13</sup> Information is plentiful, but policy makers can only make limited use of it. Policy makers at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are process and account managers rather than policy writers. They have to know their subjects, but most of all they have to know how the complex political negotiations work in The Hague, Brussels, Geneva and New York. As process managers, they must make sure that a Dutch position is hammered out on time. The negotiator must then ensure that this position plays a role in whatever European or international compromise is reached. Policy makers have little time for academic exploration. They’re answerable mainly for the timely delivery of approved instructions, dossiers and advice. What’s more, they are expected to maintain their diplomatic skills, including their knowledge of foreign languages and cultures, international organizations and negotiating skills.<sup>14</sup>

To sum up, the policy side of the gap is characterized by uncertainty, complexity, a host of ambitious objectives, an abundance of information and opinion, and little time. Not to mention the variety of political interests and political games that are played. As diplomats and policy makers at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, we are well aware that the world is uncertain and complex, and we incorporate this into our advice as best we

---

<sup>12</sup> As *The Economist* style guide puts it: “Strategy may sometimes have some merit, especially in military contexts, as a contrast to tactics. But strategic is usually meaningless except to tell you that the writer is pompous and is trying to invest something with a seriousness it does not deserve.”

<sup>13</sup> For example, Netherlands Scientific Council on Government Policy (WRR), the Advisory Council on International Affairs (AIV), Clingendael and the Hague Center for Strategic Studies (HCSS).

<sup>14</sup> To this end, the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs runs an Academy for International Relations, see <http://www.academieinternationalebetrekkingen.nl/nl/Home/Homepage>

can. But how conscious are we of the assumptions underlying our advice, instructions and positions? Do we truly do justice to the complexity of the issues we deal with? It is my conviction that we could make better use of what scholarship has to offer. That we would do a better job if we dealt with all that uncertainty and complexity in a more explicit way. Which brings me to the other side of the gap.

## II. The Academic Side

As a European and international legal expert with mainly practical experience in foreign policy making, it behooves me to be modest about the academic discipline of International Relations, which I am only broadly familiar with.<sup>15</sup> For the remainder of my address, I will refer to International Relations as IR. The gap between policy making and academia in IR is decades old.<sup>16</sup> This gap is felt even more acutely in the US than in Europe, which is odd, considering that America has a greater tradition of exchange between diplomacy and academia. But there, like here, there are those who feel the gap should be bridged. In Stephen Walt's view, academic research could help policy makers in four areas: diagnosis, forecasting, identifying policy options and evaluating policy.

Yet in practice, policy makers make precious little use of IR theory. This is understandable; rather than trying to explain a general tendency, they are often looking for a solution to a pressing problem. The incentives in academia and policy making are different. The field of IR values specialized theoretical research more than teaching or experience working in public service. Walt posits that the gap can only be bridged if academics develop a greater appreciation of policy-relevant theoretical work.<sup>17</sup> This begs the question what is 'policy-relevant'. Michael Horowitz describes four key concepts of policy relevance: *significance* to policy makers, *accessibility* (language and source, e.g. open source instead of behind a pay wall), *actionability* or ability to be translated into policy, and contribution to agenda-setting and *public debate*.<sup>18</sup>

Paul Avey and Michael Desch identified policy makers' needs by asking hundreds of them how they used academic research in their work.<sup>19</sup> The respondents indicated that the most useful thing scholars contribute is research, not policy advice. They want scholars to "generate simple and straightforward frameworks that help them make sense of a complex world." Those frameworks should be brief, and written in plain English.<sup>20</sup> But how realistic is it to ask for 'simple and straightforward frameworks' to help you understand complex issues? The very nature of complex systems is that they are difficult to reduce to simple frameworks or models. I will come back to that later.

---

<sup>15</sup> In preparing my research seminars, my reference works were Paul R. Viotti and Mark V. Kauppi (2010), *International Relations Theory*, New York: Pearson; and John Baylis, Steve Smith and Patricia Owens (eds.) (2008), *The Globalization of World Politics*, New York: Oxford University Press.

<sup>16</sup> See Harry Eckstein (1967), 'Political Science and Public Policy', in *Contemporary Political Science: Toward Empirical Theory*, edited by Ithiel de Sola Pool, New York: McGraw-Hill; Alexander L. George (1993), *Bridging the Gap: Theory and Practice in Foreign Policy*, Washington, D.C.: US Inst of Peace; Joseph Kruzel (1994), 'More a Chasm Than a Gap, But Do Scholars Want to Bridge It?', *Mershon Int. Stud. Rev.* 38:179-81; Joseph Leggold (1998), 'Is anyone listening? International Relations Theory and Policy Relevance', *Polit.Sci.Q.* 113(3):43-62.

<sup>17</sup> Stephen Walt (2005) 'The Relationship between Theory and Policy in International Relations', *Annu. Rev. Polit. Sci.* 8:23-48.

<sup>18</sup> Michael Horowitz (2015), 'What is Policy Relevance?', [www.warontherocks.com](http://www.warontherocks.com).

<sup>19</sup> Paul C. Avey, Michael C. Desch (2014), 'What Do Policymakers Want From Us? Results of a Survey of Current and Former Senior National Security Decision Makers', *International Studies Quarterly* 58, 227-246.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 243.

A few years ago, Gavin and Steinberg expressed amazement at the one-dimensional opinions many scholars expressed in the public debate on Iran's nuclear program.<sup>21</sup> Gavin and Steinberg argued that such oversimplified, polarized and insulated opinions are not useful to policy makers facing the real world. US policy toward Iran has consequences for the region, for US relations with its allies, for the price of oil, and so on.

So as an IR academic, you don't easily fit the test. Many scholars think academia needs to work harder to bridge the gap, but some people hold different views. For example, David Betz advises caution about "the gap, the putative bridge, and the ideas and people that cross it." Often "some of the ideas that make their way across the bridge are truly bad ideas that thrive only on foreign soil, as it were, because the native inhabitants there are unequipped to recognize when the exotic immigrant is talking nonsense."<sup>22</sup> There is a reason for the divide between the two worlds. Academics are good at putting things in context and at looking at things from a different perspective. "In the real world, however, thinking slow can get you dead and policy-makers need good instincts and the conviction to act decisively," says Betz.

Thinking slow can get you dead. That brings me to the first field that I see as pertinent to both foreign policy and IR theory: behavioral sciences and learning to recognize cognitive traps. A seminal work in this area is *Thinking, Fast and Slow* written by Nobel Prize Winner Daniel Kahneman.<sup>23</sup> Kahneman's work revolves around the two thinking systems at work in our brains: System 1, which acts quickly, automatically and intuitively; and System 2, which works more slowly and thoroughly, and hence requires much more energy. Subconsciously, we often trust System 1 and therefore fall into all sorts of cognitive traps.

System 1 simplifies our view of the world and makes it more coherent than it actually is. We have too much confidence in the narrative we construct as long as it is consistent, even when we know that the information we have is incomplete. Kahneman calls this 'What You See Is All There Is'. One fact presented to us in two different ways evokes two different responses. For example, patients are more likely to consent to treatment if they are told their chances of survival are 95% than when they are told their chances of death are 5%. These are simple examples, which I chose because of time constraints, but there are many more, some of them very complex.

I haven't the slightest doubt that we fall into the same cognitive traps in our foreign policy making. The largest and most costly example was the invasion of Iraq based on the assumed presence of weapons of mass destruction. Signs were ignored that did not fit the dominant narrative that Saddam had to be hiding something. System 2 was not used properly due to the conviction that the answer provided by System 1 had to be right. But these traps happen often, I would dare say even on a daily basis. When the Greek government repeatedly fails to meet the agreements it made, are the Eurozone ministers still able to see what Greece is doing right? And the other way around too: are they capable of maintaining a critical view of the German trade surplus? When we link

---

<sup>21</sup> Francis J. Gavin and James B. Steinberg (2012), 'Mind the Gap: Why Policymakers and Scholars Ignore Each Other and What Should Be Done About It', [www.carnegie.org/publications/carnegie-reporter/single/view/article/item/308/](http://www.carnegie.org/publications/carnegie-reporter/single/view/article/item/308/)

<sup>22</sup> David Betz (2015), 'Dr Dave's Hypothetical Institute for the Advanced Study of Stupid Shit', <http://warontherocks.com/2015/02/dr-daves-hypothetical-institute-for-the-advanced-study-of-stupid-shit/>

<sup>23</sup> Daniel Kahneman (2011), *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, London: Penguin.



migration to terrorism, aren't we assuming there is a causal relationship without having investigated it thoroughly enough?

Anyone working in public service should be aware of the existence of such traps and act accordingly; it is possible to avoid some of them and minimize their impact. Allowing, or rather actively soliciting, opposing views helps to avoid cognitive traps.<sup>24</sup> As Kahneman would say: give System 2 more of a chance. The same goes for learning from scholars, because they are the best-trained System 2 thinkers we have.

Obviously, policy makers need good instincts and can't afford to indulge in System 2 thinking all the time. After all, thinking slow could get you dead, as David Betz says. But putting too much trust in System 1, in your intuition or gut feeling, inevitably leads to errors, which can sometimes have huge consequences. Even highly-qualified professionals make themselves more vulnerable when they trust their instincts. Also when their decisions involve foreign policy. Remember the war in Iraq. Those who need to make decisions sometimes confuse confidence (System 1 decisiveness) with competence (System 2-based evaluation).<sup>25</sup>

Phil Tetlock applied Kahneman's ideas to IR. He noticed that experts are constantly using the media to make quasi-predictions about international events and developments. It is precisely the confidence of these experts' views and predictions that the media like so much. However, the pundits phrase their predictions so vaguely that they can't be proven wrong. If you continually use expressions like 'possibly', 'probably', and 'not unlikely', you can always claim with hindsight that you were right. Tetlock showed that the experts' statements he studied had never been logged, let alone evaluated, and that when he did, they proved no more accurate than a monkey throwing darts at a dartboard.<sup>26</sup> That prompted the question whether such 'predictions' were quantifiable, so that they could be evaluated.

The CIA's Intelligence Advanced Research Projects Activity (IARPA) sponsored a large-scale research project into forecasting in the shape of a competition, a forecasting tournament. This produced spectacular results. Volunteers with no experience in international relations were trained briefly in the concept of cognitive traps. Then they were asked to estimate the probability of a range of international events occurring in the near future (up to 18 months ahead) with a figure between 0 or 1. They were also allowed to adjust their estimate every time new information became available. The questions they were given had to be answerable by saying either 'yes' or 'no'. For example, 'Will Greece still be part of the Schengen zone on December 31, 2016?', or 'Will the price of a barrel of Brent crude oil be more than 50 dollars on March 1, 2017?'. Participants collaborated in groups, in which they shared information and their reasons for adjusting their forecasts. As it turned out, these interested laypeople scored far better than experts from the CIA and elsewhere. This was all the more remarkable because they only had access to public sources of information.<sup>27</sup> That is not to say that classified information has no added value. But it does suggest that the experts who do

---

<sup>24</sup> Hence Gowing and Langdon's argument for making way for opposing views in higher management, in their 'Thinking the Unthinkable', p. 28.

<sup>25</sup> Gowing and Langdon, 'Thinking the Unthinkable'.

<sup>26</sup> Philip E. Tetlock (2006), *Expert Political Judgment: How Good Is It? How Can We Know?*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

<sup>27</sup> See [goodjudgment.com/gjp](http://goodjudgment.com/gjp).

have access to classified information are tripped up by cognitive traps, and probably also by a phenomenon called group think.

Tetlock described the CIA forecasting tournament in his recent book *Superforecasting*. Businesses, governments and international organizations are showing a keen interest in such forecasting tournaments.<sup>28</sup> They are a great tool for identifying which employees are good at assessing a situation, while at the same time training them to recognize cognitive traps and improve their judgment. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs is about to start experimenting with superforecasting too, and will involve several other ministries and organizations in those experiments. Making numerical predictions, logging them, and explaining why they are adjusted can help create a better informed and more pertinent political debate. It can improve both the questions asked and the answers given.<sup>29</sup> And as a result, it can improve our foreign policy. This is not the first time that IR has made use of knowledge from the field of psychology,<sup>30</sup> but Tetlock is the first to bridge the gap to policy making.

So, lessons learned from behavioral science can help us improve our judgment and decision making. This is true both for individuals and organizations.<sup>31</sup> But another thing we need to do better, is to understand and interpret the world and our environment. This is where we could benefit from research into complex systems. What is complexity? Allow me to explain it in simple terms: If you throw a rock into the air, you know where it is going to land, or at least you can calculate its trajectory. But if you release a flock of birds into the air, you do not know where it is going to land. A flock of birds is a complex system. The dynamics of a complex system are determined by the nature and structure of the connections between the system's parts, and should be approached as such. Complex systems occur in nature, but also in human creations such as cities, our energy system, a university or a ministry. Six concepts are key to any complex system: (1) *actors*, (2) *networks*, (3) *social standards and practices*, (4) *evolution and path dependence*, (5) *emergence* (of patterns), and (6) *non-linear dynamics*.<sup>32</sup>

Complexity theory has gained a foothold in Dutch academia. It first made headway in the hard sciences, but now we see it elsewhere too. The Dutch National Research Agenda has given complexity research a new impetus and recently a broad Dutch Platform for Complex Systems was established.<sup>33</sup> There are now complexity programs at nearly all

---

<sup>28</sup> Philip Tetlock and Dave Gardner (2015), *Superforecasting: The Art and Science of Prediction*, London: Random House.

<sup>29</sup> For a debate on possible applications, see Tetlock and Gardner's book, but also Tetlock's Superforecasting masterclass on [www.edge.org](http://www.edge.org).

<sup>30</sup> See Robert Jervis (1976), *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; Robert Jervis, Richard Ned Lebow and Janice Gross Stein (1985), *Psychology and Deterrence*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.

<sup>31</sup> Since 2014, an interdepartmental team in The Hague has been comparing notes on using behavioral science research in policy making. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs has started a project on applying such research results to certain areas of its foreign policy. For more information, contact Hanne Bikker, Project Manager, [hanne.bikker@minbuza.nl](mailto:hanne.bikker@minbuza.nl)

<sup>32</sup> See Roland Kupers, Albert Faber and Annemarth Idenburg (2015), 'Wie is de wolf? Een systeemblik op de Nederlandse energietransitie', [http://www.rolandkupers.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Wie-is-de-Wolf\\_final.pdf](http://www.rolandkupers.com/wp/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Wie-is-de-Wolf_final.pdf), esp. 15-21.

<sup>33</sup> See [www.npcs.nl](http://www.npcs.nl). As the Netherlands Organisation for Scientific Research (NWO) put it: "Complex networks play a role in many systems, including communication, information, traffic, transportation, finances, energy, climate and our brain. Mathematics is the key to finding answers, but the questions have ramifications for many other disciplines and subdisciplines. ... A better understanding of complexity can teach us to recognize the signals of turning points in

Dutch universities, and several here in Groningen. Lex Hoogduin, for example, is Professor of the Economics of Complexity and Uncertainty in Financial Markets and Financial Institutions.<sup>34</sup> As a guest researcher, Hoogduin also advises the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on complexity.<sup>35</sup>

And what about IR? The most important research institute in the field of complex adaptive systems, the *Santa Fe Institute* in New Mexico, devotes hardly any attention to IR. A 2011 working paper optimistically mentions “a quiet revolution in complexity thinking across the foreign policy apparatus.”<sup>36</sup> But what evidence is there? When General Stanley McChrystal was shown a PowerPoint diagram of Afghanistan as a complex system, he said “when we understand that slide, we’ll have won the war.”<sup>37</sup> Yet, this diagram was a serious and rather well-executed attempt to depict the complexity of Afghanistan. This eventually dawned on McChrystal too, apparently. He later published a paper on how you need a network of your own to defeat an enemy network like the Taliban or Al Qaeda.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, a complex systems approach to global governance issues like climate change and the environment is quite common these days.<sup>39</sup> But that does not mean complexity theory has been mainstreamed in IR.

Complexity theory does not offer ready-made policy solutions. But it can enrich current ideas on politics and policy. When I say current ideas, I mean the idea of ‘the free market’ (‘market forces will solve the problem’), and the opposing idea that the state should regulate matters and levy taxes. A market-based or state-based approach, or even a mixture of the two, often fails to provide an adequate answer to the typical problems a complex system poses. A complex system needs to be analysed thoroughly. In some instances, it is possible to interfere with the system in order to move it towards a more desirable equilibrium. But the system cannot be entirely controlled.

Accepting that we cannot know everything, let alone control everything, and that we need to permanently reevaluate and adjust, requires a one-hundred and eighty degree turn.<sup>40</sup> Roland Kupers is doing groundbreaking work by helping policy makers look at topics like energy transition or juvenile delinquency through the prism of complexity theory. I believe it is worth the effort to approach foreign policy issues from a

---

complex systems sooner, and to develop clever ways of influencing unpredictable systems despite their unpredictability.” <http://www.nwo.nl/actueel/nieuws/2015/ew/nederlands-platform-complexe-systemen-van-start.html>.

<sup>34</sup> See Hoogduijn’s online course at [http://www.rug.nl/feb/education/complexity-uncertainty\\_mooc](http://www.rug.nl/feb/education/complexity-uncertainty_mooc).

<sup>35</sup> Based on the *Framework for Action under Uncertainty and Complexity*, see [www.glocomnet.com](http://www.glocomnet.com).

<sup>36</sup> William Frej and Ben Ramalingam (2011), ‘Foreign Policy and Complex Adaptive Systems: Exploring New Paradigms for Analysis and Action’, SFI Working Paper 2011-06-022, [www.santafe.edu](http://www.santafe.edu). The paper mentions three examples: an attempt by the CIA to create a complex adaptive intelligence community; a plea by two high-ranking military officers to base US National Security strategy on credible influencing of open, dynamic systems rather than on attempts to control supposedly closed systems; and a movement that approaches issues like poverty, vulnerability, emergency aid and aid effectiveness based on complexity theory.

<sup>37</sup> ‘The McChrystal Afghanistan PowerPoint Slide: Can You Do Any Better?’, [TheGuardian.com](http://TheGuardian.com), April 29, 2010.

McChrystal’s successor, General Petraeus, reportedly fired the consultant who had presented the slide on the spot. Ben Ramalingam (2013), ‘How to Plan When You Don’t Know What Is Going to Happen? Redesigning Aid for Complex Systems’, [oxfamblogs.org](http://oxfamblogs.org), May 14.

<sup>38</sup> Stanley McChrystal (2011), ‘It takes a Network’, [Foreignpolicy.com](http://Foreignpolicy.com), February 21.

<sup>39</sup> See Frank Biermann (2014), *Earth Systems Governance: World Politics in the Anthropocene*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

<sup>40</sup> Secretary General of Economic Affairs Maarten Camps discussed this in his 2016 New Year’s paper ‘Onzekere wegen naar welvaart’ [Uncertain Paths to Prosperity], ESB 101 (4725). The Netherlands Scientific Council for Government Policy had paved the way for this in its 2013 report ‘Naar een lerende economie’ [Toward a Learning Economy], <http://www.wrr.nl/publicaties/samenvattingen/naar-een-lerende-economie>;

complexity angle. I hope that we can conduct some experiments over the next few years. Let's think of the Eurozone or human migration as complex adaptive systems.

At the beginning of this speech, I said interdisciplinarity was a key concept for this Chair. IR would seem to be an interdisciplinary field *par excellence*, borrowing as it does from a wide variety of other fields. But recently, to my astonishment, I read in *Nature* that IR is one of the least interdisciplinary domains, measured by how often publications in this field cite literature from other fields. By this metric, IR finds itself on a par with urology and anesthesiology.<sup>41</sup> But if this statistic reflects reality, that needs to change. Perhaps behavioral sciences research and complexity theory can boost the interdisciplinarity of IR.<sup>42</sup>

### III. Bridging the Gap

I hope to use this professorship to help bridge the gap between policy and scholarship, because I think both sides of the divide would benefit from that. And I hope to inspire my colleagues and students at this university, and my colleagues at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to work on this together. Policy makers can make better use of university research. Scholarship offers context and clarification that can sharpen policy makers' understanding of this complex world and ultimately improve their decisions. And likewise, policy makers can provide researchers with insight into how foreign policy is actually made. Achieving this will take time and require goodwill on both sides of the gap. But there are plenty of opportunities to meet halfway:

1. Joint projects; to name just one example, the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs has been happy to use academics for its emerging issues and foresight analyses. We would like to organize more challenge and crisis sessions, where experts are asked to shoot holes in a policy proposal or to interpret a crisis. My hope is that they will also be prepared to collaborate on behavioral science and complexity studies.
2. Exchange; this Chair is part of the Foreign Affairs Professorship Program, akin to the Foreign Affairs PhD Program. Foreign policy makers give guest lectures at various universities. The Ministry also welcomes dozens of interns every year and invites academics to give lectures to its staff. The MFA's Strategy Advisory

---

<sup>41</sup> Richard Van Noorden (2015) 'Interdisciplinary Research by the Numbers', *Nature* Vol. 525, 306-7. Interdisciplinarity was measured by counting the number of citations from other disciplines in IR publications and the number of IR publications cited in publications in other fields. The author seems to have used a limited number of sources for IR, however.

<sup>42</sup> Colander and Kupers argue that the tendency in social sciences to pigeonhole thwarts the cohesive approach underlying complexity thinking. Complexity studies, however, provide an opportunity to build a truly interdisciplinary field of social science rather than linking it to other disciplines after the fact. They even propose a curriculum and name several scholars who combine complexity theory with an interdisciplinary approach. David Colander and Roland Kupers (2014), *Complexity and Public Policy*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 260-269, in which they reference Robert Axelrod (1997), *The Complexity of Cooperation*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; Dani Rodrik (2008), *One Economics, Many Recipes: Globalization, Institutions, and Economic Growth*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; Ricardo Hausmann, César A. Hidalgo, et al. (2013), *The Atlas of Economic Complexity: Mapping Paths to Prosperity*, Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

Unit recently welcomed its first scientist in residence. I would like to see much more exchange.<sup>43</sup>

3. Publications; I would like to see articles written by academics and by policy makers, which will appear in journals and blogs that policy makers read too.<sup>44</sup>
4. Research seminars for students, enabling them to learn how foreign policy is made, such as the ones I teach at Groningen University. Students visit the Ministry and receive guest lectures from Foreign Affairs staff. They write research papers that examine one aspect of Dutch foreign policy in light of IR theory. This has already generated interesting papers on subjects such as path dependence in the Dutch government's choice for the Joint Strike Fighter, and the securitization of the migration issue.

Such initiatives help bridge the gap without filling it. And that is probably for the better: policy making and academia should not merge. We need to cherish the divide just as much as we bridge it, because the ground at the bottom of the chasm, between these two sides, turns out to be fertile. That is where you meet interesting scholars who dare to come down from the ivory tower and take risks, like Phil Tetlock, Hein de Haas, or Gerald Knaus, whose migration plan was adopted by our government and eventually became the EU-Turkey deal. And that fertile ground is also where you find dedicated policy makers who seek academic input, like Anne-Marie Slaughter, Tom Fletcher (the 'Naked Diplomat'), and, closer to home, Marcel Kurpershoek. And it is also where you find think tank experts who combine the best of both worlds, like Mark Leonard. So, to return to my initial question – Can a chasm serve as a source of inspiration – the answer is a resounding Yes!

But do my fellow policy makers and scholars take the bridge builders and those who descend into the chasm seriously? Like every other discipline, IR has its tensions between interdisciplinarity and specialization. At the Ministry, the debate on generalists versus specialists is nothing new either: Do you need to know a little bit about everything or a lot about one subject? Do you need to be a fox or a hedgehog?<sup>45</sup> 'Foxes' are able to switch perspective and are more open to information that does not fit their idea or principle. 'Hedgehogs', however, have deeper knowledge in a single field, but tend to be more ideological in their judgment and hard to dissuade.<sup>46</sup> Tetlock concludes that 'foxes' outperform 'hedgehogs' in his forecasting tournaments, while the 'experts' that the media like to consult are often 'hedgehogs'. Where policy making tends to favor generalism (foxes), academia encourages specialization (hedgehogs). But both policy making and scholarship would benefit from combining generalism and specialization. We need a healthy mix of foxes and hedgehogs, both at the policy side and at the academic side of the gap.

---

<sup>43</sup> For example, a PhD student, lecturer or professor who can come test their ideas at Foreign Affairs for a few weeks or months; or a Foreign Affairs policy maker who can take a short 'sabbatical' at the university to write a paper. The Ministry's Academy for International Relations is also an excellent platform for exchange, and could eventually even lead to a joint Studium Generale program.

<sup>44</sup> E.g. *Foreign Affairs*, *Foreign Policy*, *Internationale Spectator*, *The Hague Journal of Diplomacy* and blogs like *War on the Rocks*, *Monkey Cage* and hopefully a European version thereof.

<sup>45</sup> Isaiah Berlin (1953), *The Hedgehog and the Fox*, based on Archilochus's famous sentence 'The fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing.' See also <http://hardhoofd.com/2011/06/07/de-vos-weet-veel-dingen>: "The fundamental difference between the fox and the hedgehog is that the former is aware of the complexity of reality in both thought and actions, and pursues many ends, often unrelated and even contradictory, while the latter tends to relate everything to a single central idea or principle. The fox thinks centrifugally, the hedgehog reductionistically."

<sup>46</sup> Characterizations based on Tetlock's masterclass on Superforecasting on [www.edge.org](http://www.edge.org).

**Conclusion**

And so it is foxes and hedgehogs that bring me to the end of my argument, which started with the goat herder who was spellbound by the mysterious vapors of the Delphi chasm. I am proud that I have been given the opportunity to use this professorship to contribute to scholarship in Groningen, the second-oldest chartered university in the Netherlands. A university whose original motto was: VERBUM DOMINI LUCERNA PEDIBUS NOSTRIS: The Lord's word lights our path. Which reminds me of the story of a drunkard who was searching the pavement for his keys under a streetlight. A stranger stopped and asked him whether this was the spot where he had lost them. The drunk answered: "No, it was somewhere else, but this is the only place where there's light to search by." So if you follow only the path that is lit, you might never find what you're looking for. And that is why I feel much more at home with the university's current motto: Working on the boundaries of knowledge.